

Remarks/Arguments

Claim 1 remains pending in the Application.

Claim 1 was previously rejected in view of Filion (U.S. 5,952,630) in view of Feng (U.S. 6,627,299). Claim 1 was amended and presented in by way of a request for reexamination. In the present Office Action of May 25, 2006, the Examiner indicated that claim 1 as presented by way of the request for reexamination was no longer rejected based upon the combination of Feng and Filion.

Claim 1 has been amended herein to recite that said laser beam "causes said color to bleach or whiten" relative to a portion of said outer skin not contacted by said laser. Support may be found at page 15 lines 14-19 of the application which recites

“[a]s an alternative to or used in combination with printing and/or molding, a laser, and more preferably a YAG laser, may be used to change the color (e.g. bleach or whiten) of the material...”.

Accordingly, no new matter has been entered.

In the Office Action mailed May 25, 2006, the Examiner rejected claim 1 under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Filion, et al. (United States Patent No. 5,952,630) in view of Welz, et al. (United States Patent No. 5,630,979). The Examiner stated that Filion, et al. teach the basic claimed process but does *not* teach that the skin may be colored or that marking of the skin is accomplished using a laser. For the latter point, the Examiner turned to Welz, et al.

It has been previously pointed out that Filion, et al. appears to be directed at a door arm rest including a switch panel portion comprising a substrate, a foam layer and a flexible skin with a plurality of low-profile force sensitive variable resistor sensors embedded in the foam layer. The specification indicates that "Indicia **41** can be **printed on** an outside face surface of the flexible skin to **indicate** to occupants the **function** of each force sensitive resistor switch as

shown in **FIG. 1**" (see column 6, lines 8-10 of '630, emphasis added). The Specification goes on to recite that "a transparent protective coating **43** may then be applied to the outside surface of the skin and the indicia", (to keep the indicia from rubbing off).

Thus, the teachings of Fillion, et al. appear limited to armrests having indicia printed on the outer surface overlying the embedded sensors, wherein a coating may be applied to protect the printing. Fillion, et al. is silent as to projecting a laser beam on a deformable polymer skin layer to change the color of that layer relative to a portion of the skin layer not contacted by the laser, to create a marking to indicate where a force may be applied to activate one or more switches. (See amended claim 1.)

Welz, et al. ('979) appears to be directed at a process for the inscription of moldings based on thermoplastic urethane elastomers. The Examiner pointed to column 2, lines 13-18 of Welz for the proposition that Welz disclosed laser marking on a plastic substrate that includes a commercially available pigment which under the influence of laser light is bleached. Applicant agrees that Welz et al requires the use of an additional component (pigment) to provide a bleach effect in the presence of a laser light.

Expanding upon this feature emphasized by Welz et al, Welz et al ultimately claims the exposure of a mixture of thermoplastics and additives to high energy radiation, the additive being a copper phosphate mixed with an inorganic phyllosilicate coated with TiO₂, SiO₂, SnO₂ or a copper phosphate mixed with a conductively doped compound on a silicate core. See claim 1 of Welz et al.

Note that all of the examples in Welz et al. are directed at bar coding of white, or yellow, injection moldings, again a very limited set of colors not normally used in automobile interior trim panels (which are characteristically darker shades; black, brown, blue, green, gray,

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dark red). In fact, in comparative example 1, Welz et al reports that there is no use of additives (laser absorbers) and that the results are such that the bar code that he seeks to inscribe is “not legible.”

As the Examiner may recall, the present claim recites a method of marking a skin for a vehicle interior consisting of the indicated steps, such that the inclusion of an additive, as emphasized by Welz et al., to provide a bleach or whitening result upon exposure to a laser, to create a marking to indicate where a force may be applied to deform the skin and actuate one or more switches, does not fall within the scope of claim 1. In fact, Welz et al. appear to teach away from any such feature when reporting that absent the use of an additive that provides laser absorption, no legible marking may be achieved.

In consideration of the remarks hereinabove, Applicant respectfully submits that all claims currently pending in the Application are believed to be in condition for allowance. Allowance at an early date is respectfully solicited.

In the event the Examiner deems personal contact is necessary, please contact the undersigned attorney at (603) 668-6560.

In the event there are any fee deficiencies or additional fees are payable, please charge them (or credit any overpayment) to our Deposit Account No. 50-2121.

Respectfully submitted,

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